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ABSTRACT

Gail Carr, a classroom teacher, and Rosalind Flynn, a drama specialist, have found that drama learning strategies can be applicable to many curriculum areas, especially literature. The teacher must take part, according to Carr and Flynn, by maintaining the drama in motion by questioning, challenging, organizing the group's thought, focusing on the learning area, involving less vocal students, and keeping order. Before the acting can begin, planning of the activity takes place. Who is going to play what characters? What is the setting? And what is the order of events? By doing this, both teacher and the students are ready to perform. In Carr and Flynn's article, the Chinese story of "Little Red Riding Hood" is acted out before the students read the book. After the dramatization the children are excited to read about how the author of the book solved the same problems they thought about solving. Nancy Knipping suggests another approach: allow the children to write their own stories on a topic related to the literature they are studying and then allow other children to act out those stories. By taking part in this activity, the author of the story is able to see how other children view the story. Dramatization can also be used to teach nonfiction literature. Lynne Putnam explains how one class learned about the operations of a beehive by acting out the various tasks of bees. (TB)

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Combining Literature with Drama

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Introduction

The purpose of this reading research was to investigate the use of dramatization with literature used throughout the curriculum. I choose this particular topic because I am interested in using manipulatives and visual aids to enhance the learning process not only with teaching reading but also with all of the subject areas. I feel that children learn more and will retain more information if they can visualize what it is that they are studying.

Gail Carr, a classroom teacher, and Rosalind Flynn, a drama specialist, found that by working together drama learning strategies could be applicable to many curriculum areas and pieces of literature (Carr and Flynn, 38). This type of technique involves both the students and the teacher in drama in order to enrich the literature and experience greatly.

A critical part of using drama is to have the teacher take part in the activity, not just the students. "The teacher maintains the drama in motion by questioning, challenging, organizing the group's thought, focusing on the learning area, involving less vocal students, and maintaining order" (Carr and Flynn, 39). The students have roles which will require them to think, use problem solving skills, defend or argue for something, make decisions, or come up with a plan.

Before the acting can begin, planning of the activity takes place. Who is going to play what characters? What is the setting? And what is the order of events? By doing this, both the teacher and the students are ready to perform. In this article, the Chinese story of Little Red Riding Hood is acted out before the students read the book. The teacher explains the concepts, the drama is performed, and then the children are ready to read the text. This allows the children to be creative with how they would handle the wolf. After the dramatization, the children are excited to read about how the author of the book solved the same problem.

Drama provides accessible ways to enrich the students' experience of the text in which they are studying. Many teachers tend not to use this type of approach because they find it to be time consuming and tedious. I tend to believe that the extra time it may take to use dramatization with literature will be more valuable than the time it may take to review the material over and over again to ensure understanding. Besides, the students would rather be doing something rather than just watching or listening the teacher review information. Not only does the use of drama make learning literature more concrete, but it also makes learning more interesting and fun.

In Nancy Knipping's article, "Let Drama Help Young Authors 'Re-See' Their Stories," she discusses the idea of how acting stories out helps children decide how to make their writing better. In her study she compared a strategy that involved reading, dramatizing, and discussing children's original written stories with just reading and discussing their work. Most teachers and students preferred the addition of the drama.

In this study, the children write their own story using the same idea as the literature being studied. When a student had finished writing a story, other classmates then act out the written work, each taking a part. By doing this, the author of the story is able to see the story and how other children view it.

"It's easier to think about the story when you act it out. It helps you get ideas about stories, and you can get ideas for illustrations, too." That was one comment from a student referring to using drama with literature (Knipping, 45).

After the dramatization took place, there was discussion about the story. The students would provide positive reinforcement and also tell the author what could be improved or what they would change. This strategy offered many opportunities for the authors, actors, and audience members to think carefully about their work. Often times, this activity would lead to a revision or a new idea.

Dramatization is a wonderful way to enhance the students' self-confidence, critical thinking, oral language fluency, and literacy learning. In addition, the class learns to respect one anothers advice and criticism to increase their knowledge. I feel that using dramatization enhance fashion bonds the students and allows them to work in a cooperative environment.

Lynne Putnam, an Associate Professor of Reading at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C., Believes that dramatizing and nonfiction books can go hand-in-hand in early literacy education. Normally when one thinks of books in which children act out, one thinks of stories. In the article "Dramatizing Nonfiction with Emerging Readers", Lynne Putnam shows that acting out books other than stories is effective.

Putnam states, "What nonfiction dramatizations accomplish, in my view, is a kind of transformation of factual information into event scripts" (Putnam, 464). These scripts than provide a meaningful frame in which the significant actions, facts, vocabulary, and concepts are presented in the text. It is natural for children to be creative and inventive, especially in playing make believe. By using drama to illustrate and explain text, the children are able to utilize their knowledge in a natural behavior. Therefore, they are able to retain more of the information presented in the reading. At the same time, they are thoroughly enjoying themselves and don't even realize that they are learning.

One example of Putnam's study involved a kindergarten class. During the time they were focusing on bees, the teacher created a bee hive environment for the children. She did this by explaining to the students that their classroom was going to be a bee hive and they were the bees. Each table acted as the cells of the honeycomb. When given the signal, the children would begin buzzing and land on a petal of a flower. Different signals would tall the students what their next task would be. By performing this dramatization, the children learned about the structure of the honeycomb, the jobs different bees do, the eating technique, and bee behavior.

Before reading to the students, the teacher asks the students what they already know about a topic and what they want to know. Then during the reading, these questions are addressed and other questions are used to prompt children to consider word meanings,

explanations, and comparisons. At this time the children are able to relate some of their own experiences to the reading. When the reading is completed, the teacher has the students summarize what they have learned by acting out. I think that this is a great way to assess the students and give them a chance to be creative.

Dramatization allows the students to have a physical and a visual view, as well as mental, about the literature being presented. I am a visual learner and I think that if I had teachers who used the dramatization technique in my classes, I would have enjoyed the material more and retained the information longer. One of the biggest challenges when reading nonfiction to young children is to make the subject matter interesting, enjoyable, comprehensible, and memorable. After doing research on this idea, I strongly believe dramatization works and I hope to implement drama into my own classroom ,

Timothy Hamilton is a second grade teacher at Dodson Elementary School in a Nashville suburb named Hermitage, Tennessee. Unlike some of the other classrooms at Dodson which are filled with all sorts of technology, Hamilton's classroom is filled with books. In fact, anywhere he could find a place in his room to shelf a book, he did.

Reading literature is very important to Hamilton. Every day the children are immersed in literature. Hamilton has "found a way to use children's literature in every subject he teaches, including mathematics" (Teacher Magazine, 22). The children in this class learn to love and appreciate all kinds of books and look forward to the activities performed which are focused around the literature.

One way in which Hamilton involved his students in a reading activity was the use of interaction. Hamilton distributed a copy of the poem "Band-Aids" and a band-aid to each student in the class. Needless to say, the students were intrigued. After reading the poem, he then asked his students to estimate how many band-aids were used (math). When the students finished guessing, Hamilton had each student put one band-aid on a chalkboard character to involve them in a situation similar to the one they had just read. The students enjoy to actively participate in these types of activities in order to grasp a better understanding of the situation.

I believe that Timothy Hamilton takes the right approach in using visual aids and active participation in his classroom to enhance the learning process, not to mention the make school and learning more fun. By using drama or other activities, the child is able to take a book and gain a personal relationship with it.

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